

ANAND KARJ



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I Introduction

The ceremony by which a man and a woman become a couple, husband and wife, is known by different names in different communities. Major names among them are marriage, wedding, Nikah, Viyah, Shadi, Parnay, etc. The Sikh name for this social event is *Anand Karj*.

Anand Karj means a function which provides bliss, delight and tranquillity. Marriage is *Anand Karj* because the two persons, a man and a woman, join together to live a holy life of peace and happiness leading to the realization of the Almighty Lord. This way the couple jointly walk on a path which helps them to achieve the mission of human life.

The Gurus told that marriage is one of the most important responsibilities of mankind. Not to marry or to pledge celibacy has no religious significance. Such lifestyles do not make one a holy person as claimed by some of them. Marriage, even from a worldly perspective, is a natural function of human life.

II Purpose of the Article

It is often seen that the rituals performed at the ceremony differ with the persons performing the ceremony. Lack of required number of capable missionaries has reduced the function of *Anand Karj* to the performance of mere rituals, though it is a great religious event in the life of a Sikh. In many cases *Anand Karj* is seen to be greatly influenced by Brahmanism. Some rituals performed in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib are completely opposed to its honor and the principles of the Sikh Rehat Maryada. Yet, it is claimed that "*the Anand Karj was performed exactly according to the Gur Maryada.*" Is there a greater ignorance than this? Non-Sikh practices need to be avoided by every Sikh in order to maintain the essence of true *Anand Karj*.

Due to lack of proper direction and able preachers, many *Anand Karj* ceremonies are taking place that is not *Anand Karj* in the real sense. In reality Sikhs observe many Hindu rituals believing them to be Sikh formalities required for the marriage ceremony. For example, *Jaimala* and *Sehra Bandi* are purely Hindu customs wrongly adopted by some of us. Reading of *Sehra* poems in the *sangat* during the *Anand Karj* is not a Sikh way of giving advice to the couple. Such advice can be given only by a qualified Sikh preacher. Considering the bride's family to be inferior is an anti-Sikh belief. If we observe these non-Sikh customs, then the only difference between the two marriages will be that in Hindu marriages the couples walk around a fire while in Sikh marriages they walk around Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Yet, we claim it to be a Sikh marriage. Therefore, there is need for the publication of this article.

III Historical Perspective

Legislation of the *Anand Karj* ceremony was done only recently in 1909. Because of the strong social pressure of the majority community and active efforts of Brahmans, *Anand Karj* was a forgotten ceremony. During the British Raj, Sikh weddings were performed in general by the Brahmans. The couple went round the sacred fire four times and Ved mantras were sung by a Brahman to solemnize the marriage.

After the Guru period, when the Mughal government ordered the killing of the Sikhs and gave rewards to the killers, the Sikhs left the villages and moved out to safe places in jungles, hills and forests. People sympathetic to the Sikhs, but Hindus at heart, managed the Sikh Gurdwaras and the properties attached to them. They introduced Hindu rituals which over time were considered Sikh practices. During the British Raj, these hereditary custodians, called Mahants, of the Gurdwaras, were made owners of the Gurdwaras and the properties connected with them. Unlike their ancestors they were not devoted to holy way of life. They adopted immoral lifestyles and did not care to provide religious services to the community.

This enraged the Sikh community and they started a movement to get rid of the Mahants as well as the Hindu rituals from the Gurdwaras. However, the Hindu community considered the Sikhs to be a sect of Hindu faith. The Brahmans did not want the

Sikhs to get out of their net. The Singh Sabha movement, through its educational process and political strength, convinced the British government that Sikhs are a sovereign nation and are not Hindus. Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha State, Sunder Singh Majithia, and Bhai Kahn Singh played a key role in this struggle and got Anand Marriage Act passed in 1909. This gave *Anand Karj*, the Sikh marriage ceremony, a legal status. It also legalized the *Anand Karj* ceremony of the Sikhs performed earlier than 1909 as a protest against Brahmans conducting the Sikh marriage.

IV *Lavan* Hymn

It should first be mentioned here that the hymn, titled *Lavan*, was not composed to be recited for the celebration of the Sikh marriage. Its purpose, like that of all other hymns, is spiritual and it guides a Sikh on the path of the "marriage" of the soul (the bride) with God (the husband). Gurus have used all aspects of daily life to explain and convey the Gurmat message. Many social functions such as birth, engagement, marriage, death etc., have been used as examples to explain the principles of the Sikh faith. Similarly, the 15 days of the moon, the seven days of the week, 12 months of the year, different seasons of the year, 35 letters of the Gurmukhi alphabet etc., have all been employed as references to preach the Gurmat message.

A bride, for her marriage, has to bear the stress of alienation from her parents family and developing respect for the members of her husband's family. Similarly a Gursikh is to live a married life with full respect and regards for the Guru, and remaining detached from the worldly pleasures. While living a family life the couple do not get happiness by achieving their mundane desires but by practicing the path of Gurmat, *sewa-simran* life.

The Sikhs believe in the Guru's word (Gurbani) for directions in living their life. Gurbani is an eternal knowledge for them and they renounce the sins mentioned in the Gurbani. Further, they dwell upon His Name and practice righteousness. A mutual respect creates a spiritual bond, it is the first step for a successful marriage.

The married couple, or spiritual "bride", upon developing the above mentioned qualities will qualify for the grace of God, the "husband", and attain divine realization.

Meaning of the *Lavan* hymn

Guru Ram Das, the fourth Nanak, while composing the hymn employed the Indian custom of four *Lavan* for marrying a bride to the groom. Using this metaphor, he wrote this hymn consisting of four stanzas to explain the spiritual marriage of the soul with God. This is the mission of human life as prescribed by the Sikh faith

The meaning and message (not the sentence-wise translation) of the hymn are given below.

Each Lavn starts with the invocation, "God, I am obliged to You, for Your Grace."

i) The first Lavn thanks God for providing the devotee the guidance of the Guru who engaged him to love the Lord. The lucky person, devoted to God, enjoys the bliss of His love and this keeps all the sins away. Nanak says, this is the beginning of the "marriage" of the soul with God. As the first Lavn (the first circumambulation), signals the beginning of the marriage ceremony, the act of devotion sets one on the path of God realization.

ii) As a result of devotion, one enters the next stage of meeting the Lord, devotion to Him gets rid of his ego, the "dirt", and makes his mind clean. It is then filled with the awe (respect and regard) of meeting the Lord. This makes him free from all fears. The devotees, in association of the holy sing His virtues and find God very close to them. They realize God pervading everywhere in the universe, within themselves and without.

iii) People who do not care for worldly charms develop a desire to meet the Master. These fortunate persons, in the association of holy people, utter His virtues and realize the Lord. By His Grace, holy people meditate on the Lord and find Him echoing in their hearts. This third step commits them to the love of God and keeps them away from worldly charms.

iv) With the realization of the Lord, the devotees achieve bliss, everlasting peace and equipoise. They find Him to be lovable and "sweet." The wish of meeting the Lord is fulfilled because of their day and night devotion to His Name. God Himself plans this function of "wedding," and it fills the "bride" with immense joy and pleasure. This is the fourth step that completes the union of the soul with the ever-alive Lord.

The philosophy and message discussed above may be briefly stated as below:

By adopting the metaphor of four circumambulations made by a couple for their marriage, the Guru wrote a hymn having four parts for the "marriage" of the soul with the Lord. The bride has to give up her old lifestyle lived at her parents house to successfully settle into the groom's family. Similarly, a person has to give up ego and love of worldly charms and are devoted to the love of God to enjoy spiritual bliss with Him. This is realized with the Grace of God.

V Significance of Marriage

(a) Western Marriage: In the modern world, marriage is not much more than a social contract and entertainment. There is little essence of purity, cooperation, and fidelity. There is marriage one minute and possibility of divorce the next minute.

In America and Europe, establishment of family courts for divorces proves that these countries have not been able to set ideals of marriage that will assure righteousness, honesty, compromise and fidelity between the partners. These virtues are essential to provide tolerance, happiness, patience and contentment in married life. Instead of changing their habits and behavior to adjust and accommodate to their spouses, the partners experience restlessness and wander like a bumblebee. Each individual has his/her own way of living, own likes and dislikes without regard for those of the spouse. Such personal weaknesses do not let the two live together with "one mind," which can create a firm foundation for a successful marriage. Further, an easy access to divorce weakens the ability to make compromises.

(b) Indian Marriage: In India ideals of marriage were full of injustices. A woman's place was very inferior (low), even scornful. Upon a parent's death, not a daughter but only a son has the right to perform funeral and cremation ceremonies. Deceased parents can be helped only by a son to cross Baitarni River to attain salvation. Hence, a woman is required to produce a male child.

Woman was considered an obstacle on the holy path. She is assumed to be defiled, and scornworthy to such an extent that even looking at a paper woman (female doll) was prohibited. This is why the birth of a female child is not welcomed and is considered a curse.

Man's right and undue control over woman had increased to the point that a woman was like any other material possession of her man who could even give her to a Brahman in alms. Raja Nal and Pandays wagered their women in gambling.

Woman being considered a *Shudar* (untouchable) was not allowed to wear Janju, the Hindu sacred thread. If one lost her husband, she was burnt alive with her dead husband so that her unfortunate shadow will not pollute anyone else. This inhumane and tragic ritual was called ironically, *Sati*, a sacrifice for truth. It was, therefore, performed with an elaborate ceremony.

(c) Sikh Marriage: According to Gurmat a woman is neither a toy, a tool for the entertainment of man, nor is she inferior to man. She is an equal partner of man. Sikh Gurus believed that considering woman weak is a degradation of society. Marriage is not merely the joining of two physical entities but a meeting of two minds and more importantly the meeting of two souls. Physical love is determined by external beauty that is like a passing shadow. It is not wise to base a life long relationship on such transient things as beauty.

The Guru recommended the marriage to be based not only on the union of the two minds but also on the union of the two souls. In other words, Anand marriage is two individuals becoming one in mind and soul. Love of soul does not fade away with the fading of physical beauty.

The couple endeavors to harmonize their Atma, souls, with 'Parm-atma' or we may say to merge their souls with GOD (Parmatama). The couple promises to follow Gurmat and to love and live a truthful life. According to Gurmat philosophy, to

abandon or renounce the world and family life means avoiding life's real struggles. To be bummers, burdening workers and laborers is neither worship nor asceticism.

Parvarti Marg (married and family life) does not allow a person to wheel and deal. It does not permit dishonest earnings, involvement in immoral / illegal deeds, to serve a vulgar or low character person for bread and butter, or waste away life in pursuit of vices.

VI Code of Conduct

A Sikh must marry only a Sikh, regardless of their caste, race or nationality. However, it is good for a Sikh to have good social relations with all persons, irrespective of their faith. Whereas, interfaith friendship is desirable, interfaith marriages are not permissible because they cannot be functional. Marriage requires the couple to live as "one soul". Further, "one soul" cannot practice two faiths. Faith is not just merely a belief but a way of living for achieving the mission of human life.

Following social aspects need to be kept in mind by the Sikhs for deciding the marriage of the Sikh youth:-

Caste: Sikh religion does not believe in the caste system. To give importance to the previous caste (before becoming a Sikh) of a Sikh is opposed to the principle of the Sikh faith. Anyone who takes Amrit no more belongs to any caste but becomes a member of the joint family system that is Khalsa.

Singh and Kaur: It is important to use Singh with the boy's name and Kaur with the girl's name on wedding cards and also when they are announced in the Sangat. The name of the caste should never be attached with the words Singh or Kaur.

Child Marriages: It is prohibited to marry a boy or a girl in their childhood. They should be physically, mentally and behaviorally (in their conduct) mature.

Engagement: Engagement is not necessary. If one wishes, girl's parents may invite families and relations for this function to be held in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. No Hindu customs should be observed during this engagement or during *Anand Karj*.

Date of marriage: After consulting both parties any suitable day may be fixed for the wedding. It is wrong to consider

the rise or setting of some stars, solar or lunar day, in determining a date for marriage. Sikhism does not believe in the holiness or otherwise of such days. Gurbani says that all days are equally good. Therefore, consulting an astrologer for selecting a day for a wedding is not permissible for a Sikh.

Alcohol: Use of alcohol is strictly forbidden for a Sikh (Gurbani pages 360, 554, 1293 of the Guru Granth Sahib.) It has been witnessed that many families ignore the above advice. Sometimes a generous use of alcohol is made during marriage and other happy functions. One who disobeys the Guru's advice cannot claim himself to be a Guru's Sikh. If the Sikhs observe the Guru's teachings on all social functions, it will bring peace to them and also raise the image of the Sikh community. It will also save the youth from drug use.

Dance: It is not becoming of Sikhs to invite professional dancers. They do not reflect good moral image. It is an uncivilized show. Marriage is a very serene, sacred and serious religious ceremony of the Sikhs. The two, *Anand Karaj* and professional dances cannot go along together. It is sad to see Sikh men and women hand in hand dancing on the streets while going to the bride's house.

Jaimala (Garland) ceremony: *Jaimala* has been copied from the custom of ancient *Swamber*, selection of the groom by the bride from a group of contenders by garlanding him. It is a complete marriage in itself. After the *Jaimala* ceremony, doing *Anand Karj* in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib has no meaning and is improper.

Superstitions: All Sikh functions should start with the *Ar-das* before the Almighty and thereafter they have no room for superstitions, omens etc. One must stay alert from being influenced by such traditional rituals and customs.

Making Demands (Dowry): This is another evil that has crept among the Sikhs. The groom's parents particularly those coming from high class families demand cash, jewelry, properties, clothes, cars etc.. from the bride's family. It causes many problems in finding suitable matches for the girls. According to *Gurmat*, selling a girl (accepting money for marrying her) is also prohibited. It has become a serious social evil and the Sikh community should make a united effort to stop these non-Sikh practices.

VII Performance of the Ceremony

Flower girls: Quite often very young girls or boys and girls carrying the flowers or rings enter the Dabar Hall hand in hand before the bride. This non Sikh custom not only distracts the attention of the congregation but also appears to be disrespectful to Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This western custom must be avoided.

Setting up of seats: It is often seen that a separate seat is set for the bride and groom for their *Anand Karj*. This practice is opposed to the principle of equality of Sangat and respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The couple should come to the Guru in humility to receive blessings for their married life. Hence to set up a special soft mat (blanket) for them to sit on is wrong.

Sehra: Groom wearing a *Sehra* or *Kalgi*, and bride wearing a veil in Guru Darbar are both opposed to Gurmata. Therefore this practice should be avoided.

Supporting Bride during Lavan: Many friends and relatives stand to support the bride during *Lavan*. It is inappropriate. Bride and groom should walk around Sri Guru Granth Sahib on their own without support. This custom has its roots in child marriage. It also can be traced to the ritual of giving a girl in charity. Both are prohibited in Sikh faith.

Showering of flowers: The practice of showering the bride and groom with flowers during the fourth *Lavn* is becoming very common. It must be avoided. To shower human beings with flowers in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is to reduce the respect for the Guru. Any such ritual to honor the couple can be done outside the Darbar hall.

Use of Garlands: It is inappropriate to honor the bride and groom with garlands in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. To avoid this sacrilege, the couple should be taken out of the Gurdwara for the garland ceremony. However, it is okay if on behalf of the Guru, the management lets the Giani Ji bless the couple with a garland after the *Anand Karj* ceremony is over.

No fake hymns: A blessing, 'Jori Jevah Yug Char' is sometimes sung by the Ragis mistakenly thinking it to be the hymn of Guru Gobind Singh. It is *kachi-bani* (fake song) and it is very inappropriate to sing it anytime in the Gurdwara or as a blessing. These words should not be recited by a Sikh at all.

Sehra / Sikhya Reading: *Sehra*, generally a description and appreciation of the family members of the couple, should not be read in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Same applies to *Sikhya* reading. Only Gurmat advice (*Sikhya* by a Sikh preacher) is recommended.

Maintaining Discipline: Some persons, considering the *Lavan* reading merely a ritual for marriage ceremony, usually engage in talking in the Darbar hall which is undesirable. It is disrespectful to the Sangat and the Guru to have meaningless conversation during the ceremony. Gurbani should be listened to with due respect and full attention.

Superstitions: Generally, *Amrit Vela* (early morning) is the most appropriate time for *Anand Karj*. But to think that it must be completed before noon is Brahmanism. Gursikhs are advised not to believe that afternoon is inauspicious for such a function. If one wants, the ceremony may be performed in the evening. The principle of the Sikh faith is, *Sai Ghari Sulakhni* ... meaning anytime is a good time when one remembers God.

Mutual respect: When the groom goes to the bride's house he should not expect a special respect and treatment from the bride's family members. They should co-exist as equal members of the Khalsa Family.

Veil: A Sikh woman should not use veil being a daughter-in-law in her husband's house. She should live like a daughter of the family. Sikh *Maryada* and veil do not go together.

Observing special days: Keeping fast on days such as *Karva Chauth*, or observing other Hindu rituals like *Rakhi*, *Tikah*, *Guga-Puja*, *Sangrand*, *Masya* etc. is prohibited for Sikhs. Such dates / days are not sacred or in any way special in the Sikh faith.

Birth in the family: To rejoice on the birth of a boy but feel sad or inferior on the birth of a girl is against the principles of the Sikh faith. The birth of a child (boy or girl) should be accepted as a blessing of the *Akalpurkh*.

Remarriage: In case of death of either spouse the other partner is allowed to remarry. Remarriage is conducted in the same manner as the first *Anand Karj*.

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The main purpose of the society is to promote Sikh Faith, according to the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikh Rehat Maryada (published by S.G.P.C. and endorsed by Sri Akal Takhat Sahib).

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